

Romanian migrants between origin and destination: attachment to Romania and views on return

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Crossing borders making Europe

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The Europeanisation of Everyday Life: Cross-Border Practices and Transnational Identifications Among EU and Third-Country Citizens

**Romanian migrants between origin and destination:
Attachment to Romania and views on return**

Elena Tudor

(EUCROSS Working Paper 8, pp. 45-61)

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Introduction

Romanian migration has a temporary and circulatory character: on the one hand, people are moving back and forth to and from a destination and on the other hand, there are migrants who either resettle in Romania, come back in the home country and then emigrate to a different destination than the initial one or move to a new destination after spending time abroad without returning in Romania. This paper underlines the factors that shape these distinct possible strategies¹ and types of mobility, with a special interest towards intentions and plans for return. In doing so, we look at the bonds Romanian migrants maintain with their home country and explore the different typologies and categories of migrants as moulded by their experiences, opinions and attitudes towards the origin country.

The main questions of interest concern how the experience of migration shapes the attitude towards the home country and the intention to return, how did the crisis influence such aspects (if it did) and what the main factors that appear as significant to one category of migrants or another from this point of view are. The EUCROSS qualitative interviews did not include a specific category of questions concerning attachment to the home country or how return is thought of by migrants, but related ideas are present in most of the respondents' stories – whether they speak about themselves or about the situation of other Romanians they know of or they have heard of.

Some of the important dimensions of the connection with the origin country are the visits they make or the visits they receive from home – what is referred to in the working papers of the EUCROSS project as physical mobility (Favell, 2001), family members they have in Romania, their orientation in tastes and consumption towards destination or origin (food, movies, music), the relations they have with Romanians at destination or at origin, the view they have on Romania and Romanians.

In this sense, we focus on concepts such as transnationalism, home orientation (Sandu, 2010b), return intentions and projects while keeping in mind the heterogeneity of Romanian international migration in terms of individuals' characteristics, motivations for departure and return, destinations and wave of migration.

For this purpose, we use fifty one of the sixty one interviews realized with Romanians as part of the EUCROSS project in Denmark, UK, Spain, Italy and Germany. It is important to specify that most of the respondents (41) selected for the interviews are persons with a 'high transnationalism level': an index for the level of transnationalism was created by GESIS team in EUCROSS specifically for this study (Pötzschke, 2012), and this was the criterion used in the selection of the interviewees.

Theoretical background

Return migration is a topic that attracts increasing interest since understanding it through the explanation of factors that contribute in the process allows a better comprehension of the migration phenomenon overall and the evaluation of its impact at origin, with influence on the migration policy (Adda, Dustmann and Mesters, 2006). Scholars are mainly concerned with the development stimulated by returnees' investments, the social remittances they bring with them and their reintegration in their home country. Due to the complexity of the matter, it raises significant challenges for definition and operationalization. While the literature agrees that return encompasses travels to the origin country, there are different options scholars choose in making the distinction between various types of going home. However, everyone agrees that, in line with the migration process overall, the decision to return is never definitive, but one that is considered and reconsidered by the individuals during their migratory experiences (Sandu, 2010a: 90). To some, return is only considered in terms of permanence of resettling at home – for example, Bovenkerk chooses the terminology of return migration only for the first return of the migrant, and when more than one return happens, he speaks of circulatory migration (Bovenkerk, 1974: 6). Current approaches to return migration view it more as a reversible step in the migratory process thus including it as part of a circulatory mobility of individuals. While some scholars include regular visits under this term (King and Kristou, 2011: 452), we only refer to return in terms of temporary or definitive resettlement at origin and discuss visits separately – as factors that can influence the predisposition of return rather than as forms of actual return. In doing so, we will discuss intentions and plans to return, the relation of individuals with Romania, family aspects and elements of adaptation at the destination as factors which allow us to draw the picture of the migrants' potential return. The discussion takes into account differences between individuals' intentions and how structured their plans to return are, while keeping in mind that intentions are modified under the influence of different factors throughout the migration experience (Sandu, 2010a: 90).

Methodology

The analysis of this paper is based mainly on qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews² with fifty one Romanian migrants in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain and UK during the second phase of the EUCROSS project. Also, in order to place the respondents in the broader picture of Romanians' migration experiences in these countries, quantitative data resulted in the first phase of the project³ were used. The interviewees were selected on the basis of a transnationalism score⁴ so that for each country there are eight persons characterized by high transnationalism and two of low transnationalism. Five women and five men were interviewed in each country.

There are various limitations involved in using and interpreting the data. Firstly, interviewees' selection was highly influenced by their availability both in terms of time and in terms of attitudes towards the study. Secondly, the interview guide does not include specific questions on return intentions and plans. However, in the case of Spain and Germany the topic was brought up in each discussion, which allows us to differentiate between potential returnees and migrants who would rather either stay in their current destination or move to a different country than Romania. While respondents in Italy,

Denmark and UK were not directly asked whether they would like to return or not, it is interesting to note that for some, the topic was more or less spontaneously raised by them during the discussions. For this reason, the analysis relies on an interpretation of the migrants' narratives about their home country⁵ for all the five destinations, which are more important than actual expressed intentions regarding return for interviews taken in the latter three countries.

The interview was mainly oriented towards issues related to physical and virtual mobility, travel and transnational practices and attitudes towards the crisis and the EU. For the purpose of this paper, we mostly considered the information that respondents offered in relation to:

- Past experiences abroad
- Preference for foreign or Romanian tastes in films, music and cuisine
- Social circle at the destination (natives, other immigrants, Romanians) and connections maintained at home through telephone, internet and visits with friends and family
- Comparisons between Romania and other countries
- Return intentions and plans
- Attitudes towards the home country and Romanians
- Attitudes towards the crisis and the EU

In order to place the fifty five respondents discussed here in the overall sample of the EUCROSS survey, characteristics of the 1250 migrants surveyed in the five countries are referenced throughout the paper.

General characteristics of interview respondents

There are different patterns that can be identified in terms of destinations, each country having its specificity. While part of the characteristics of the individuals depend on the methodology of choosing them, they are surely mirroring at least some of the particular „ways of migrating” into each of the five countries.

In Spain, departures happened between 1998 and 2006 with seven of the eleven interviewees (aged between 32 and 56) having the experience of at least one trip abroad before that. It's noteworthy that eleven interviewees in Spain have the lowest level of education on average. While in all the five countries both individuals of low and high education were selected, there are more students or persons having completed high school in this category for the other countries than they are in Spain. In terms of return, seven of the respondents would like to come back to Romania, whether they have structured plans or not – some would go as soon as possible if they had the opportunity of good jobs at home, while others plan to go to spend their pension there or wait to gain more money for their house and investments in Romania.

In Italy, respondents left between 1993-2006 (very similar to Spain, except for a 40 year old man whose father is Italian), five of them having left Romania at least once before, with ages between 19 and 48, overall younger than in the case of Spain and similar to those in the UK, having completed either high school or faculty. Only one of the ten interviewees stated that *our life is now here so I don't think of Romania in... Yes, maybe I will return, but for the moment I live here.*

In Denmark, the Romanian migrants interviewed are between 22 and 50 year old – they are younger than both in the UK and Italy, and more of the respondents than in the other countries are students there or have studied at some point and continued working in the

field. Departures for Denmark happened between 1988 and 2011 (with students having left after 2007) and, except for two of them, similarly to those in the UK, all visited another country before Denmark either for work, studying or tourism. Similar to Italy, only one person considers going back to Romania, but doesn't think it will happen too soon considering the „situation” there – the respondent is not only referring to the impact of the crisis in Romania, but to the problems concerning better living conditions which she perceives.

In Germany, the respondents are between 22 and 70 year old and went to their current state of destination between 1971 and 2010 – the most inclusive country from these points of view. Seven of the Romanians interviewed in Germany have a previous experience of going abroad before settling in Germany. With regards to education, five of them have at least completed faculty and another two are currently undergraduate students. Five of the respondents mention intention to return.

In the UK, departures took place more recently, between 2004 and 2011, and the respondents are younger (23 and 55), except for one, all having travelled abroad before. With the exception of three persons, those in the UK don't consider returning to Romania: one who will return shortly, having finished her studies here (with the possibility of the return only being temporary since her description of her experiences suggest a potential desire to migrate again), a woman who has no organized plans, but mentions that she *would come back tomorrow if she could*, and one who already invested in a house and land in Romania and postpones the return in order to gain more money in the UK.

While most of the interviewees mention at least one instance when they felt discriminated against at the current (or past) destination, for some, the increased number of Romanians and immigrants in general has a negative impact where benefits in the social system and poor integration are concerned. Especially in Denmark, Germany and the UK, respondents think that not being able or willing to learn the language and to become integrated should not be an option for newcomers. It should be noted that, especially those in the UK, often mention the natives' fear of a Romanian invasion. Also, with regards to how Romanian migrants perceive the natives, they consider them colder and less friendly in Germany, Denmark and UK, often viewing the Italian and the Spanish “warmer” and more similar to Romanians, culturally speaking. Most of the migration experiences of respondents from Denmark and UK are related to studies abroad in these countries for bachelor or master programmes. For those interviewed in Italy and Spain the average level of education is lower than in the other three countries.⁶

Migration to Germany has a stronger ethnic particularity⁷ than the rest of the countries and also includes more situations where leave was mediated by a working contract at the destination, whether before 1989 (the overall sample includes six persons with travel experiences before the fall of communism, two of them in Germany) or after. Also, Germany is linked to the strategy of seeking asylum both during the communist era and soon after 1989 and is also mentioned as a country where obtaining papers was easier. There are situations where Romanians planned to go to a different country, but chose to pass through Germany in order to obtain papers. This is similar to how Denmark was used as a transit country shortly after 1989, as Gabriel, a 50 year old man from Denmark mentions:

Well, I have been living here [in Denmark] since 1990. I left, I should have left for Canada as a matter of fact, it was much easier to leave for Canada from Denmark. If you stayed in Denmark, the Canadian Embassy would mind your documents more rapidly. I began doing my emigration documents in Canada and after that you could not work here anymore.

Nobody gave you... how do they call it? (...) A work visa, and because of that I went to Switzerland. I worked in Switzerland for about a year, after which I came back, I met a Danish girl in the meantime, I married her and I gave up my idea to leave for Canada, I remained here.

It should also be noted that many of the interviewees have the experience of multiple migration, which “underlines the trial-and-error character of migration as well as the exploration of various destinations depending on emerging opportunities” (Ciobanu, 2013: 1). Among the fifty one respondents, besides tourism, there are three main categories of encountering more destinations: those who went to countries such as Turkey and Hungary right after 1990 for petty trade, those who worked in a different country previously for spells ranging from months to years and those who visited at least one other country as part of a study program abroad. Almost all of the interviewees from Denmark and UK had a previous trip abroad before their current destination, which is closely related to the educational profile of these two countries – since here we have more MA students or people who have graduated postdoctoral programmes.

How does return appear in the discourse of Romanians abroad?

With the exception of a few cases, most do not have really structured plans⁸ to resettle to Romania, most of the respondents only considering it as a vacation and family and friends visiting destination. In the following part of the paper we will discuss the respondents in depending on the certainty of their return, as it is revealed by the interviews. There are only few situations where individuals declared their wish to return while at the same time we could identify *actual behaviour oriented towards this decision*. Alexandru, male, 24, lives in Germany and has very well organized plans for return: he came to Munchen to study and following the completion of his MA he will come back to Romania to take charge of the family business. In the meantime, he visits Romania regularly two times a month to see his family and friends. With a very different background, Ana is a 55 year old woman who lives in UK with her husband. She has a long experience of working abroad before coming to UK, especially since she was one of the few to be able to cross the border before 1989 for a work exchange opportunity in Germany in the field of tourism for a few months and later worked for eight years in Greece, where she went illegally in 2000. While she thinks the British weren't that affected by the crisis, she mentions that *the crisis affected me more because everything we earn here we invest in Romania. Well, in Romania, everyday things get more expensive and so... I said to myself to go home after three years, and five years have passed, because it's more expensive...* Ana invested in land and a house in Romania and is one of the persons who *postpone the return* in order to complete the building of the house. Elena is a low skilled migrant who has been living in Spain since 2003. In spite of the prolonged period of stay there, she is very connected to Romania (but this doesn't imply a lack of adaptation in Spain) watches Romanian TV stations, she buys products from Romanian shops in Spain, cooks Romanian food and visits the country frequently. As with Ana, Elena's return is also delayed by the need to raise more money to invest at home:

As long as I have a job, I will stay in Spain. Afterwards, I'll go to Romania anyway, I won't stay here forever, but as long as I have work... I'm thinking of building a house, that was my dream when I came to Spain, but... Since I had the kids in college... more expenses.

Now I'm hoping to... since they're having an income (...) I would like to move to Romania sooner, but as long as I have the chance to work here, to... Well, since I've been here for so long already...

The same is with Alin, who came to Spain in 1998 with the intention to gain money in order to start a business at home. While he and his wife are sure to return in a few years, their *initial plans for swift return have changed*: they postpone the moment and visit Romania frequently for business purposes – he has a constructions business in Spain and collaborates with firms from other countries, including Romania. Also from Spain, Sorin wanted to return to Romania ever since he first left and now his plans are about to materialize and he intends to return this year. He visits Romania four times a year, has invested in a house there and even though his brothers and sisters are all abroad (in Spain and USA), and has a partner who will remain in Spain, he is adamant about his imminent return and can't wait for the day:

And now that I have in mind to return home, the week passes so hard. When I was in the army, the last months passed as difficult as these (...) [Do you want to return home?] Yes, anytime this year I want to return home. [For good?] Yes (...) [You say that you like it here and you would take this whole village in Romania, but are you still thinking of returning?] Yes. [As beautiful as it is here, does nothing convince you?] No.

Cristina also has clear return *plans for retirement*, she and her husband investing in a house there. However, they have differences regarding this issue, since she is not that sure of the desirability of this solution, both because she is well adapted in Germany and because she is worried about uncertainties at home:

I would come back to Romania... in the evening of my life! Because we have an apartment, we've built a house which is not ready yet, but... I don't know, sometimes when I see all those things on television, I am disappointed and say: why have I worked and made so many things with my husband? Only to work, save and make something for Romania. [And the idea is that you are going to Romania in the end?] Yes, this is my husband's idea. Mine... no longer 100% because... but there's also N. and N. is already 8 year old and loves to go to Romania, she loves Romania.

Cristina is a good example for the *familial nature of return decisions*: while in general, migrants want to return to members of the family left at home (Sandu, 2010a), her case proves that the opposite is not true – despite having their family there, migrants do not necessarily intend to permanently resettle abroad.

Romanian migrants also have thoughts of coming back home which do not seem to materialize in the near future and are *under question*. In many cases, it is a *longing for the country* and the *prospect of spending retirement in Romania*.

Maria is an interesting example of a person who wants to return and is trying to find a solution in order to do it sooner. Her husband wants to remain in Spain, since he is afraid they will not find work in Romania at their age – Maria is 51 year old. However, she is very bent on coming back and struggles to find something at home for this possibility to materialize:

[Are you searching in Romania for this possibility?] I still talk with my friends, I talk a lot, a lot with my friends in Romania and with my family and all that. 'Let me find it for you', that's what someone told me last winter, 'let me find you a place to work as a chef.' Oh, dear me... chef, wonderful, for... God knows how much?

Maria is one of the migrants who have to deal, as she says, with *a battle between staying and not staying*, but she's strongly determined to come back some time in the future:

[How will it turn out in the end? Will it be Romania, will it be Spain, Spain for good?] Not Spain for good. No, no, no. [But what if the husband doesn't want to, how will it turn out?] No, Spain for good will never happen. [You're not giving up?] No, no.

For Ioana, a highly educated 37 year old woman who is married with a Romanian of German ethnicity, Romania remains the country where she feels most at home. Even if she sometimes considers going back, her husband is not of the same opinion and they both agree that living conditions there are not an option when compared to remaining abroad. Roxana is highly attached to her home country and while the possibility of resettling there is very distant, for her,

Romania is a country where I feel great every time I go there. This is why we go to Romania all the time. It is the land of my heart and it will remain so, it is my country! It is the country in which I have spent 28 years of my life, where I went to school, where I met my husband, it is the land of my soul! So for me Romania is the country where I would go back anytime, even tomorrow.

Anca has been living in Italy since 2005 when she followed her husband who had already been working there for five years – *we had to choose: either for him to come back home or for us [their child and her] to come here. I chose to come here.* While return is ruled out of their plans for the moment, it appears to her as a vague possibility in the distant future: *Our life now is here, I don't think of Romania as... Yes, maybe I'll go back, but now I live here.*

There are many situations where return was initially planned, but it is no longer desirable or seems farther and farther away for the migrants. Sorina first left the country in 2003 when she went to Spain and she initially missed home and planned to return. However, her case offers a good illustration for how *even structured projects for return that begin to be put into practice can change*. She invested in a house in Romania, but currently plans to sell what she owns there and buy a house in Spain. She keeps up-to-date with what happens in Romania through press and television, she still misses her home country, but considers Spain as a better option in terms of living conditions and incomes. She visits the country rarely – once every two years – and is decided to settle in Spain permanently:

I don't think about coming back. I don't think, I'd like to buy a house here, and sell what I have in Romania. My husband doesn't even want to go there on holidays. We go every two years, because he doesn't want to, but I sometimes even go alone, to see my folks, to take care of our business there. We're still in touch, but most of our roots are here, because we've built a life here, a family, everything.

Cristian is a 33 year old carpenter who has been living in Spain with his wife since 2005. They came here with the intention to raise some money and come back and continued to

long for *life as it is at home*. However confident they are about their return, the couple expects a baby and already take into consideration that this will probably at least delay their plan:

[So there is no doubt that you will go home?] Yes. Not now for sure... But... yes. [Do you have children?] No, we are going to have a child, that's why I said that tomorrow nine months would have passed. It's about to happen anytime soon. [So she will give birth in Spain? And you will come back with the baby? Do you think that the baby has anything to do with your decision to leave Spain?] Well, I do not know that... if the child manages to go to school, it's very hard to... it depends on how the children put up with... But we... I don't like it [in Spain], but whatever happens, happens anyway.

Children raised in the destination country⁹ or the prospect of this happening may lead to the reconsideration of the initial plans to go back to Romania. Alina is a young woman married in Germany who already thinks of returning to Romania for her retirement. However, she and her husband are not decided whether to start building a house and to actually move there in the future since they are already taking into consideration the possibility of difficulties that could come across on the long term if they have children.

I used to want to move back [to Romania] and my husband told me that he doesn't want to, if I do... he said that I chose to stay here and if I want to go by myself, he won't come with me (laughs). He said that everyone is running away from Romania, and I'm the only one who wants to go back. The truth is that if you want kids and we want a lot of kids and if you think about their future, then Germany is the country where you can make a career for yourself and you get paid well unlike Romania, because people here have very good jobs, they have very good salaries.

Mihai is an interesting example of a young Romanian who already has a long experience of travelling abroad since he was 14 year old. His family is Pentecostal¹⁰ and they all left the country in 2006 when they joined his aunt in Spain. In 2008 they decided to go to England, but ended up in Germany and they first visited Romania as late as 2009. However, the 22 year old man visits Romania as often as possible and, in spite of spending many years abroad, he would return if offered a good salary:

[Do you miss Romania?] Yes! [Is Romania still home for you?] Yes, it still is. It is and it will always be. I always gladly come back to it. And I always say that if the system would be better, if my wage were not as high as 2000 euros, but 1000 euros in Romania – which is here a very small wage... So if my wage were 1000 euros I would not hesitate to go back there.

What keeps these migrants abroad – whether they plan to remain in their current country of residence or also think of a different destination – varies from the economic realm, including better job opportunities and higher living conditions, to family reasons, such as the indecision of the life partner or dependence of their plans on their children's future. At the same time, they either think of an indistinct possibility of return with an indefinite placement in time or about retirement plans.

Who would rather stay abroad or have no desire to return?

In the case of Germany, as expected, those who have been settled there for a longer period of time – who came before 1989 or soon after – do not plan to return, even if they considered it at some point in their migratory trajectory. In Spain, those with higher education prefer their current location abroad or even think of new destination countries, such as Italy or Canada. Most of the respondents in Italy are rather focused on their life there, as is the case of Gheorghe, who says that after a few weeks in Romania he already wants to return to Italy, which he sees as his home; Sorina, who has children in school there; and Marinela, whose husband has a business there, they bought a house and her children go to the university in Italy. The same is the case in Denmark and UK, which can be explained by the fact that younger, on average more educated persons are among the interviewees.

The younger and more educated individuals usually link their future to staying abroad since they find more *professional opportunities* there than at home. 28 year old Nicolae, who used to work in IT in Romania and has now completed acting studies and works both within and outside the field, describes this clearly:

Well, I can give you many reasons to why I left the country. What was offered to me here and what I managed to do in three years, Alin, I swear, in my entire life, I didn't think it was possible (...) I don't know... there is absolutely no comparison! My effect here cannot be compared with anything I ever had in Romania.

As with profession, the same is the case with *education opportunities*, which are openly embraced by young individuals.

Next to these, better living conditions and higher wages are the main reasons that determine Romanians to migrate abroad and to consider staying rather than going back home. Persons in this category usually reach a point where they feel more secure abroad and grow more and more *disappointed with Romania*, especially when comparing the two spaces of opportunities. For Geanina, 34 year old highly educated woman from UK who travelled a lot, her initial feelings of homesickness turned into the other extreme:

To be honest, I am so disgusted that I don't think... I am not thinking about a return to Romania... (...) I feel disgusted about what happens in Romania, I am very disgusted and I... I don't know, maybe now I still have reasons to go to Romania, my father is still alive... or after some years I will go and light a candle in the memory of my mother, but this is all. I don't even like the thought of spending the holidays there.

43 year old Horia, also currently living in UK, is more attached to his home country than Geanina, but similarly discontent with the situation there, having gone through many failure experiences:

Because it [England] gave me a different perspective, because it gave me security to not worry about the next day, because I finally managed to not lose in a fleeting moment everything I've worked so hard for. I started three faculties back in Romania, I didn't manage to finish any of them, because I had to work. I started about 6-7 businesses, but I lost all of them. Because of the people and because of the system.

In terms of professional and income security abroad, many choose to prolong their stay outside Romania, which sometimes makes it permanent, because of *higher employment chances abroad* for certain ages and qualifications. People of ages above 50 and those who are already retired have difficulties in finding work in Romania, but it is easier to do so abroad, in cleaning and child care for women and as construction workers for men. Similarly, when it comes to jobs for the highly qualified, people often perceive better opportunities abroad than at home. Even if this category of persons are not at risk of remaining unemployed in Romania as is the case with the low qualified, they are often motivated by wages and working conditions abroad.

However, these are not usually sufficient reasons for ruling out return: while most persons presented in the first part of the section left for the same reason and postpone resettlement in Romania in order to gain more money, there are others who are not attached to their home country anymore, such as Geanina. Among them, we can make the distinction between those well integrated who have developed a certain level of *attachment to the destination* and those who feel as “citizens of the world” rather than belonging to one country or the other. In Radu’s words, once you leave the country,

you’ll always be on the road and a stranger. Wherever you are, always a stranger. [Do you still feel like that, do you still have these feelings?] Yes, yes, still do, you stay your whole life like that and the idea of being a foreigner I even passed on to my children because, in a way, we moved within Germany too, for example here, three times and they haven’t had a place they could describe like: I was born there and I want to go back to that town. In their heads it’s just: we live where we live, we’re on the streets.

Radu is “on the road” since 1970, when he was 16 year old – he travelled with his father and mother as Israeli citizens – and never considered resettling in Romania throughout his life. More than that, this was instilled in his children as well. Schutz discusses the condition of the stranger as a social actor who perceives and experiences the world in terms of “relevance to his actions” (Schutz, 1944: 501), meaning possibilities for and limits to his activities. In the case of Radu and other migrants, the country of residence is not a location they are attached to, but one where they can meet their goals in terms of living conditions and lifestyles. They can live anywhere, as long as opportunities allow them to and context brings them there. In these situations, the *lack of attachment* itself plays another major role in encouraging a higher mobility for migrants.

Depending on opportunities, the economic crisis context and the availability of useful social networks in other countries (Ciobanu, 2014: 5), Romanian migrants are also thinking of *moving to a different country*:

[Would you leave Spain?] If I had a different offer, yes. [Where?] Somewhere where I’d have work, I don’t care. [But if this work place would be in Romania, would you go to Romania?] No. [But if you wouldn’t have this job, would you go back to Romania?] No. [So you see yourself on the long term in Spain?] Yes.

Mihaela has been in Spain since 2000, had also worked in Germany for some years before and says she wouldn’t come back to Romania not even during the current crisis conditions, not even if she could find a place to work there. Mircea has been in Denmark since 1990 and while return is not an option, he and his wife are negotiating between moving to Australia

and another country: *we were thinking about moving from Denmark to Australia, so that is a destination, but being so far it's tough. The wife can't break away from Europe that easily. We need to be somewhere close, to communicate with her family, and so that mom could come and help and visit...* Migrants in this category usually mention that they would not choose to resettle in Romania even if they got a better job and a good wage there.

Reintegration in the origin country is another problem faced by those who would consider resettling in Romania. Lack of friends and family there, as well as not being used to the life style and system back home discourage thinking of Romania this way, as is the case of Cosmin, a 33 year old man who has been in Italy since 2005 and only started visiting the country after 2011:

Many times I regret coming here, that I chose this path, but now it's too late anyway for going back, I mean I couldn't reintegrate back in the country, I couldn't do anything anymore. And sometimes I'm sorry because I've isolated myself here a lot, I mean I don't have friends anymore, I don't have anything... nothing, nothing.

Disconnecting from life in Romania, not keeping in touch with the situation in the country, becoming distanced from acquaintances and having less friends there can lead to migrants' remaining in an isolated state, as Cosmin says, from themselves, from the origin country and from the country of destination. While in the literature on migration, alienation is often discussed with focus on how it first materializes in the origin country, before migrating, and as an incentive for this (Modarres, 2005), in Cosmin's case, his perceived alienation occurred after moving abroad.

Homesickness is also frequently mentioned both by those who want to return and by those who see their future on the long term outside Romania. The distinction is that for some it lasts while for others it slowly fades away. This usually happens as time goes by, once they find a job and start working and interacting with their colleagues and after members of the family come abroad. This is the case of Alina:

[Do you miss Romania?] Yes. [Did it stop being that painful?] I would say it kind of stopped being that painful. [Since when, would you say?] Well, I would say, for about two years now. By next year it will have already been eight years since I first got here [in Germany] and you get used to it. It used to be very difficult at first because I wasn't working, but when you're working and going home, and going shopping and cooking and cleaning and taking a shower and the day has gone by, you don't have that much time to think 'Oh! I want to go home! I want to go home!'

Even if homesickness is strong in the beginning and it causes people to think about returning after saving money, in time they get to increasingly value their lifestyle abroad and actually feel good there, and the need or desire to frequently visit Romania weakens, and routine helps in the process. This is the example of Alexandra who has been in Spain since 2001 and has only visited the country three times although she really missed home in the beginning.

An often mentioned "solution" to appease feelings of homesickness is *frequent visits* migrants can make home (and receive from relatives and friends) and the perceived "availability" of Romania. Even if before 2000 and in the following years Romanians had difficulties visiting their home country because of their undocumented status, as regularizations became available and more of them obtained required papers for work and stay in their destination countries, going home got simpler. As Ana puts it:

No I didn't [miss home] Why?! Maybe the kids, I missed the kids, but generally speaking, I didn't really miss home... I earned money, the distance was short, I mean, let's say that in one day and a half I would be back home and the thing was that, at any given time, after a year, I had papers and I could go back home, in Romania. So, the conclusion is that nowadays it's easy to travel around Europe, you miss home, you take a few days off and you go home, if you have a family and you want to see them.

The reasons for visiting Romania range from going for papers and for business purposes, seeing friends and members of the family home, to tourism escapades. It was very interesting to find that in migrants' discourse, Romania often appears in an enumeration of countries where they spent their vacations and as a touristic destination as any other. Roxana, among others who do the same, recounts countries she has been to:

In Europe we have visited... We live in Britain, we were in France, we were in Spain, we were in Italy, we were in Monaco, we were in Switzerland, in Austria, in Germany. Not to mention Luxembourg, Belgium... We did not reach Poland, Romania of course, we were in Bulgaria, we were in Turkey a couple of times. We did not visit Greece yet¹¹.

Another tendency encountered among some of our respondents was the *more pronounced preference for Romanian movies, music and food* since they left their country. Sorin thinks that this is something that often happens with Romanians "here":

[What kind of music are you listening to?] Now, when I'm far from home, Transylvanian folk music. [Were you listening to folk music before coming to Spain?] I was listening, but not as much as now. (...) But I think all Romanians who left the country started listening to that kind of music.

Gheorghe, from Italy, mentions similarly that *Oh, I think of manele when they started in '91. Being in Germany, when you heard one, being away from home, I think any Romanian that stays abroad and lives outside and missing home, Romania, friends, mother, father, everything, it touches their soul a bit.* Next to spending time with Romanians, listening to Romanian music, eating Romanian food, buying Romanian products from specialized shops available at the destination and receiving packages from home remains one way of softening their homesickness.

All these elements create a larger picture of the world of "returning or not returning" of migrants, a world of "home orientation" (Sandu, 2010b) or of an ambivalent location between more countries, which can be conceptualized as a bi-local transnational space. The freedom of mobility that was allowed to Romanians by migration policies throughout the years makes them both closer to their home country and farther from it, permitting them to visit Romania easier and at the same time facilitating search through multiple destinations for better job opportunities and living conditions. In these situations, often, Romania remains a point of reference only as a vacation destination or as the country to spend retirement in.

Where does the crisis stand in the story?

Two macro factors that can influence the decision/intention to return are the economic crisis and the fact that while years ago migrants had to deal with problems related to their documents upon leaving the destination (difficulties in obtaining papers to re-enter the destination country) this is not so much the case anymore. However, it is interesting to note that in the case of our respondents the crisis does not seem to play a major role. Regarding this, while most of the fifty one Romanian migrants interviewed in 2013 as part of the EUCROSS research discuss problems that themselves or their acquaintances had because of the crisis (among others, most often they mentioned loss of job and difficulty in re-employment, more or less significant decreases in salaries, inability to continue paying rates for their houses at destination), they do not consider return for this reason. Family reasons, better job and business opportunities at home and attachment to the country seem to be the most important reasons for planning to return. Among the persons who mention their intention to come back to Romania, only few of them specify that they or their families were affected by the economic crisis and none of them directly linked this intention to the crisis. As for the second factor, more freedom of international mobility due to rights ensured by the EU and the destination countries does not seem to be an incentive for return in the case of our respondents, but only to allow them to more securely visit their home country more often than they could especially before 2000, in some countries (such as Italy and Spain, where regularizations for illegal immigrants were available in 2002 and 2005), and also before 2007 for other destinations where the EU accession was essential¹².

Times of economic crisis ask for strategies to cope with this situation and, depending on its effects in different countries, people may think of relocation or return. In the case of our migrants, the crisis is frequently described as imaginary or as having little effect on them and their families at home. To some, as Marian from Denmark puts it, *There was only an economic crisis on paper, but there really wasn't one*. The crisis had fewer perceived negative effects on those who are more qualified and more educated, as well as on those who have a longer experience of working abroad.

In some cases, the crisis is associated by Romanians abroad with lower wages, the loss of jobs and difficulties in finding new ones. Such problems that are directly influenced by the crisis in the respondents' view are especially noticeable for those working in constructions, for business owners, as well as for persons working in domestic services who have less "households" and hours to work, since the natives "cut their costs". However, this case is not as frequent as might have been expected, and many times stories revolve around trying and succeeding in finding work at a different destination – among other reasons, this was also mentioned by some respondents as the reason for relocating to their current destination. More often in the discussions we encounter stories of friends, acquaintances or people they "hear of" who are either considering return, have already returned and either stayed in Romania or came back abroad or are orientated towards other destinations.

Elena is one of the migrants who, during the discussion about the crisis, mentions such stories:

Actually currently there's a family from Romania, they're leaving for Romania at the end of the month. [For good?] Yes. [Do you know anyone else?] Others... There are others who went back to Romania, stayed there for a year, didn't make it, came back to Spain... I know some like this. The same with Sorin, who says about how the crisis affected friends of his: The ones working in the constructions field were stricken; almost all of them were

(...) They left. Those who managed to find something else, but... many went to England, or where they could, in Italy.

We should also note that the perception of some migrants of the effects of the crisis can be influenced by the fact that, while they had problems at some point, that spell is already a past one and one that they could manage.

Transnationalism and return

The transnational migrant is a person “living” at the origin and at the destination at the same time (Glick Schiller et al., 1995). People often live in a “transnational space” among others, by means of following the news about the origin and settlement countries, of keeping in touch with members of the family and friends and being visited by them, of opening businesses in both countries or planning to return. Respondents commonly talk about their life as being both “here and there”, both at their current destination and in Romania. They also refer to themselves not necessarily as English, Spanish or Italian and so on, but as living as the English or Spanish do. Transnational practices and identities allow them to move easier between different countries and access resources that are useful to their mobility in terms of finding jobs and studying opportunities.

Unfortunately, the data at hand does not allow us to draw conclusions as to what is the difference between those of lower or higher transnationalism since only two persons of low transnationalism were interviewed in each country and, subsequently, the sample is too disproportionate for this specific comparison.¹³ However, there are some aspects that can be emphasized based on the transnational dimension.

While in the case of the Romanians who became detached from their origin country and slowly “burnt their bridges” with Romania return is not considered, in the case of transnational migrants we have a different type of attitude towards return. Although they do not necessarily plan to return on the short term or long term, there are two ways in which they continue to “be present in Romania”. This is exemplified by the cases discussed in the section above, where individuals start seeing Romania rather as a vacation destination than an option for relocation. Moreover, once transnational migrants build stronger links to other countries, and are also keeping in touch with life in Romania, physical return in their home country is no longer perceived as necessary: virtual communication possibilities next to frequent visits are enough for them to live both in Romania and abroad. To summarize, living in a transnational space allows migrants to be present both at the destination and origin (or even multiple countries) without demanding physical (re)settlement in either place.

Transnationalism is often discussed in terms of new identities that migrants develop as a consequence of contact with the destination, so-called “double identities” (Cassarino, 2004: 8). Next to this, there are other identification patterns that can be observed among our respondents which are confounding with the categories built in the EUCROSS project: Romanian migrants sometimes state that they “feel” or “are” European (Recchi, 2012). Others see themselves as Romanians, as both Romanians and Europeans or as “citizens of the world”, as is the case with people who have a long experience of migration, often since they were children. Return is rather taken into consideration by those who are closer to Romania both in terms of identity and transnational practices.

Conclusion and discussion

Romanian migrants are oscillating between staying, returning or moving to a different country. Below are some of the patterns of attitudes and intentions regarding return for those interviewed as part of the EUCROSS project.

- Some respondents mention that either they or their partner does not want to return, and prolonging the stay at the destination or becoming permanent residents there often seems to be the adopted strategy in such cases.
- Both for those who have more structured plans to return and/or want to gain more money for investments in Romania or simply because of their temporary satisfaction with their life there, the return, although desired, is postponed.
- Having children at the destination – either born there or raised there – makes migrants reconsider their plans to return. Our respondents confirm that return decisions are highly familial in nature and that females are more prone to be oriented towards coming back to Romania (for a discussion on the distinction between males and females with regards to return see Sandu, 2010a).
- The lack of a higher level of security at origin in terms of income, job opportunities, bureaucracy, social system, studying opportunities, business possibilities, as well as the difficulty of being hired at origin after a certain age compared to the possibilities encountered abroad determines Romanian migrants to continue living and working outside Romania.
- Many Romanians want to return for their retirement or for opening a business at home with the money obtained by working abroad.
- Reintegration is another concern for people who have lost contact with friends and family in Romania, do not follow the news and have not visited the country frequently.
- Higher transnationalism levels allow the accumulation of more resources and thus increases mobility further. This is why migrants are more inclined towards moving to countries they have already lived in or new countries than returning to Romania, as a result of comparison between different locations.

Notes

¹ For discussions on migration as a “life strategy” see Sandu, 2000.

² The interviews were conducted by Alin Croitoru in Italy, Denmark and UK and Monica Șerban in Germany and Spain – where eleven instead of ten respondents were interviewed.

³ The first part of the EUCROSS project consisted in a quantitative survey of natives and migrants – five data basis including 250 Romanians in each of the five destinations were obtained.

⁴ The transnationalism index was built using variables related to trips abroad, communication with family and friends outside the country, knowledge of foreign languages, interaction with foreigners, and sending or receiving money from abroad (Pötzschke, 2012).

⁵ Again, it is interesting to note how frequent Romania appeared – mostly brought up by respondents – during the discussions besides the direct questions related to comparisons between Romania and countries they visited where they settled in.

⁶ The interviews were conducted with five persons from the low category and five from the high category of education, the criterion of the distinction being the graduation of high school.

⁷ This is mainly explained by the migration of Transylvanian Saxons after the Romanian revolution.

⁸ Which is related to the concept of “level of preparedness” (Cassarino, 2004) or, in other words, the “structured plans to return” (Sandu, 2010a: 78).

⁹ This terminology, despite the academic tradition and use, seems at times outdated or inappropriate, as for the migrants this country becomes the new “home” country. Labelling it as a destination implies an uncertain statute: it allots this country a temporary or process-like dimension, which is not necessarily the case as the trajectory between countries is reversed: the so-called “destination” often becomes the new “starting point” for further mobility. This observation was suggested to me by a colleague who preferred to remain anonymous, whom I thank.

¹⁰ I mention the religious confession of the individual and his family, since it explains the particularity of the example: a family of nine persons went abroad in search of a better life after selling everything they had in Romania and bought a trailer for their exploration of those new countries where they had contacts.

¹¹ In reinforcing our questioning of the “destination country” label, this quote provides further evidence of how the current residence country serves as a primary reference point regarding not only future but past mobility as well.

¹² Romanian migration abroad for economic reasons knows three main stages between 1989 and 2006: the incipient period of “individual exploration” between 1990 and 1995, the “collective” exploratory stage until 2001-2002, and the period before 2006, when the number of departures increased as a consequence of the liberalization of Romanians’ circulation inside the Schengen area (Sandu 2010a, 7). Each of the three periods knew specific elements regarding the composition of the population, the destinations, and the strategy used by the people in the process. Subsequently, the 2007 EU integration and the financial crisis which became manifest in Romania around 2008-2009 also influenced the dynamics of the Romanians’ departures for work abroad, with impact on migration selectivity, the orientation towards specific destinations and the occupational status abroad.

¹³ This is by no means a shortcoming of the study but is related to the EUCROSS’ project initial stated purposes.

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